INDISCIPLINE AND LOW PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA CIVIL SERVICE: CAUSES AND STRATEGIES FOR ERADICATION

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ABSTRACT
The civil servants are expected to serve the public with dedication, professionalism, diligence, honesty and impartiality, so that the goal of state will be achieved. However, the existence of various acts of indiscipline in Nigerian civil service is a source of concern to the government and the citizenry. Civil servants in Nigeria exhibit discipline at minimal level coupled with high level of indiscipline which have consequential negative effect on their productivity and service delivery in Nigeria public service. Cases like abuse of office, absenteeism, truancy, reporting late to work, siphoning and embezzlement of public funds, delay actions on files, drunkenness at work, tribalism, sectionalism and nepotism are various act of indiscipline that abound in the civil services. The study discuss various causes of indiscipline and strategies for effective control.

Key words: Discipline, Indiscipline, Civil Service, Productivity, Service Delivery.

INTRODUCTION
The productivity and survival of any organization depend largely on the quality of its employees and how much they are able to align themselves to the goal and policies of the organization. One of the major problems facing Nigeria civil service is how to manage the personnel by successful government in Nigeria. This is particularly important because of the level of indiscipline in Nigeria civil service is found to be responsible for low productivity in government’s desire to achieve higher living standards for the people (Adebayo, 2001). Batty (1974) argued that effective management of organizational workforce is possible only if manager adopts the correct approach to motivation, the giving of instructions and where necessary, discipline, and this requires high level cooperation from the workforce.

Effective discipline depends not only on sound leadership and a good personnel policy but also on the full cooperation of employees to such policies of the organization.

In a situation where the employees are not in conformity with organization rule and regulation and set standard, there will be poor performance and low level of productivity. Arowolo’s view (2010) is in line with this argument when he observes that the lack of total regard for ethical standard and rule and regulations throughout the agencies of government and civil service in Nigeria is a serious drawback. This is because civil service is one of the machinery of government saddled with the responsibility of implementing the will of the state.

There is no doubt that in any dispensation in Nigeria be it military or civilian the civil service is looked upon to provide certain fundamental services for the smooth running of the government of the country.

It will be worthy to note that the executive arm of the government whose responsibility is to implement all the governmental programmes rely heavily on the civil service to perform this important function. However, because of the abysmal performance and indiscipline in the civil service, the civil service has been attacked by renowned administrators, bureaucratic and academicians.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that much is expected from this organ of government the lackadaisical attitude with which the civil service performs its duties has generated a lot of heat for both past and successive government in Nigeria.
Indiscipline has almost become a household word used to describe the civil service. Several review commissions have been set up dating back to colonial days. In order to find solution to the negative attitude of the civil servants to work.

Also successful regimes have made their assumption and have propounded or formulated strategies towards tackling the problem of indiscipline in Nigerian civil service. For example, Gen. Yakubu Gowon thought that with more pay he could improve on the moral and productivity of the workers hence the Udoji Commission of 1974. Late Gen. Muritala felt that by using national purge the system will be put aright Shagari regime formulated the idea of ministry of National guidance – the National ethical revolution – to chart a new code of ethics as a panacea to halt the dwelling standard of behavior. The Buhari/Idiagbon introduced the war against indiscipline (WAI). Obasanjo in the fourth republic introduce monetization of Fringe benefits policy. However the Nigerian civil service is yet to be there.

It is on this background that this paper examines indiscipline and low productivity in Nigeria civil service with a view to identify the causes and offer strategies for eradication of this ugly situation so as to wake the civil service from its deep slumber.

AN OVER VIEW OF NIGERIA CIVIL SERVICES

The origin, structure and performance of the contemporary civil service in Nigeria are highly traceable to colonial administrative formation. Civil Service in Nigeria has its origins in organizations established by the British in colonial times. The Nigerian Civil service is a body of government employees entrusted with the administration of the country, and mandated to carry out the policies of the government of the day. In other words, it is the body of civilian employees of any level of government, not subject to political appointment and removal, normally hired and promoted largely on the basis of competitive examination. Bade (2009).

Nigeria gained full independence in October 1960 under a constitution that provided for a parliamentary government and a substantial measure of self-government for the country’s three regions. Since then, various commissions have studied and made recommendations for reforming of the Civil Service, including the Margan Commission of 1963, the Adebo Commission of 1971 and the Udoji Commission of 1972-74. A major change occurred with the adoption in 1979 of a constitution modeled on that of the United States. The Dotun Philips Panel of 1985 attempted to reform to the Civil Service. The 1988 Civil Service Reorganization Decree promulgated by General Ibrahim Babangida had a major impact on the structure and efficiency of the Civil Service. The later report of the Ayida Panel made recommendations to reverse some of the past innovations and to return to the more efficient Civil Service of earlier years. Ali (2003). The Civil Service has been undergoing gradual and systematic reforms and restructuring since May 29, 1999 after decades of military rule. However, the civil service is still considered stagnant and inefficient, and the attempts made in the past by panels have had little effect on the productivity of the Nigeria Civil Servant.

CONCEPT OF DISCIPLINE

Discipline can be defined as action or behavior on the part of the authority in an organization aimed at restraining all employees from behavior that threatens to disrupt the functioning of the organization (Nel et al., 2007). In the same vein discipline is concerned with the imposition of certain restriction on the behaviours of workers of an organization. Discipline is the regulation and modulation of human activities to produce a controlled performance. Mcfarland (1979) posits that discipline refers to conditions of orderliness in which members of an organization conducts themselves with respect of the needs and desires of the organization, subordinating to some extent their own needs and desires.

Dessler (2001), and Riles and Byar 1996 exposed the two side of discipline, it is seen as a procedure that corrects or punishes a subordinate because a rule of procedure has been violated; discipline should be viewed as a condition within an organization whereby employees know what is expected of them in terms of the organization’s rules standard and policies and what the
consequences are of infractions. From the various definitions above principal objective of discipline and disciplinary procedures is to secure consistence behavior in accordance with the accepted norms of behavior. That is prompt individual or group of workers to observe rules, regulations, standard and procedures deem necessary for an organization. The failure to perform as expected could be directly related or to the rules and regulation that defines proper conduct at work. A second objective of discipline is to create or maintain mutual trust and respect between the supervisor and subordinate. Improper administered discipline can create such problems as low morale and resentment between the supervisors and the subordinate. This is where the problem of public organization start leaders (top civil servant) who are supposed to lead by example by being disciplined are the very comes who exhibit attitudes of indiscipline.

It is more often than not, the leaders who misused government vehicles, report late to work, siphon and embezzle public funds, delay actions on files which come to their tables, get drunk while on duty, play truancy, engage in act of tribalism, sectionalism and Nepotism to decide who get what, when and how (Achebe, 1986, Okoli 2004). However, proper administration of discipline will not only improve employees behavior but will also minimize future disciplinary problems through a positive supervisor – subordinate relationship (Grober, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield, 2006).

Indiscipline, on the other hand, refers to unruly behavior, disobedience and condition of disorderliness in which members of an organization conduct themselves without respect to the rules and regulations and subordinating their needs and desires to the overall needs of the organization. According to Ochai (1984) staff indiscipline is manifested in many ways in the public sector such as habitual lateness to work, truancy, and lack of commitment to work: loafing, buck-passing or refusing to take responsibility. It also includes bribery and corruption, tribalism and nepotism, misuse of government property.

Civil servants in Nigeria, exhibit discipline at a minimal level coupled with some elements of indiscipline. In this condition, for example, staff may report for duty, in time and sometimes late. On arrival, they may perform their duties without seriousness. After spending few hours on duty some of them take permission to go out of the workplace while others just sneak out or put their bags on the table with a pair of shoe and other things to disguise that they are around the office but they are miles away.

Some of them may take permission to stay away from the office for a number of days for fabricated reasons. Others may just absent themselves for reasons that are far from cogent (Ochai, 1984.) It is needless to say that productivity is affected negatively by these vices of staff in the Nigeria civil service. According to Adebayo (2001), such acts of indiscipline include lethargy, apathy, laziness, rudeness to members of the public, malingering, presenting false sick certificate in order to go and attend to private business and a host of other deplorable attitudes.

THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Staff discipline deal essentially with the ability of employees to remain within the bounds of the rule of conduct as defined by the organization. It also connotes employees’ submission to the organization’s authority to direct, or restrain their activities in the workplace. The essential elements in the factors of discipline are therefore the willingness of the employees to abide by the rules as defined by the organization and the ability of the organization to extract compliance with their rules from their employees. Either way, both employees and organizational actions are involved. The two theories employed for this study are Reinforcement Theory and Broken Window theory.

The reinforcement theory deals with the action of the organization (response) in response to the action of the employees (stimulus) with the intention to either encourage or discourage such employees’ action. The reinforcement theory grew out of the experimental analysis of two distinguished psychologist, Ivan Pavlov and Edward Thorndike, who formulated the principles of
classical conditioning. Under this principle, “if a behavioural response to a particular stimulus is rewarded, that response is more likely to be repeated. But if it is not rewarded or is punished, that response is less likely to be repeated” (Reitz 1977:55). B.F. Skinner also quoted by Reitz (1977:42) advocated that behavior is a function of its consequences. Consequently, behavior that results in desirable consequences is more likely to be repeated, while behavior that is results in undesirable consequences is less likely to be repeated. In other words, people’s behavioural choices are guided by what they anticipate its outcome to be.

Relating this theory to the subject at hand, it is assumed that the willingness and desire of civil servants to conform or not to conform to the civil service rules and regulations are largely dependent on the reaction of the civil service to both those who comply with such rules and those do not comply with them. If the civil service encourages those who conform by some form of reward desirable by such employees, they are likely to continue with their compliance. If the civil service imposes negative and undesirable sanctions on those who rebel against the rules, they are likely to refrain from behavior that attracts undesirable outcome. If the civil service is indifferent to those who comply as well as those who rebel against the rules, the choice of behavior by employees will be dependent on other personal considerations.

Viewed from the perspective of the reinforcement theory, staff discipline within an organizations is dependent on the response of the organization to the actions of its employees.

However, the behaviorist approach is to reinforce desired behavior and ignore undesired behavior on the theory that, because the desired behavior is reinforced, it will be repeated while the undesirable behavior will be extinguished. This may be true in training animals, but when inappropriate behavior is allowed to continue in the classroom and it is ignored, chances are that such behavior will continue. In fact the irresponsible behavior may even become worse because ignoring inappropriate behavior may encourage more of it.

Social scientists, in contrast to behaviorists, have a different approach. It originated form the so-called “broken windows” theory of urban decay. This approach holds that if a single window is left unrepaired in a building, in fairly short order, the remaining windows in the building will be broken. Fixing windows as soon as they are broken sends a message: vandalism will not be tolerated. But NOT fixing windows also sends a message: vandalism is acceptable. Worse, once a problem such as vandalism starts, if left unchecked, it flourishes.

James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling made this theory famous in 1982. They wrote:

“The link between maintaining civil order and preventing crime is similar to the process whereby one broken window becomes many. The citizen who fears the ill-smelling drunk, the rowdy teenager, or the importuning beggar is not merely expressing his distaste for unseemly behavior, he is also giving voice to a bit of folk wisdom that happens to be a correct generalization—namely, that serious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behavior goes unchecked. The unchecked panhandler is, in effect, the first broken window. Muggers and robbers, whether opportunistic or professional, believe they reduce their chances of being caught or even identified if they operate on streets where potential victims are already intimidated by prevailing conditions. If the neighborhood cannot keep a bothersome panhandler from annoying a passerby, the thief may reason, it is even less likely to call the police to identify a potential mugger or to interfere if the mugging actually takes place.”

When irresponsible behavior is demonstrated by the civil servant and the appropriate authority does not take necessary action to correct it, such behavior is encouraged. However, such behavior can easily and quickly be stopped by taking appropriate disciplinary measure to correct
the negative behavior. In the vast majority of cases, the act of reflection stops the undesirable behavior.

Behaviorism ignores the “Broken Window Theory.” *Discipline without Stress* attends to inappropriate behavior.
FACTORs RESPONSIBLE FOR STAFF INDISCIPLINE IN NIGERIA CIVIL SERVICE

To ensure staff discipline possible factors responsible for staff indiscipline in the Nigerian civil service will be examined with a view to seek a way of eliminating them and substituting in their place factors that will positively enhance discipline. Kankwenda, (2002) posts major reasons for staff indiscipline in the public service induces mismanagement of conflict, lack of better understanding of conflicts, their root causes, earlier signs or indicators, dynamics and the manner in which they can be permanent, brought under control and eventually resolved by the organization. Yahcioglu (1996) opines that “people get involved in acts of indiscipline because their interest and values are challenged or because their needs are not meant ….” However, for the purpose of this paper, the factors responsible for indiscipline in Nigeria civil services are discussed here under:

a. Economic Factors

A climate of pervasive poverty and the relatively low and irregular payment of salaries to worker will promote indiscipline and large scale corruption not only among the civil servant but also among the elected representatives the people. A healthy economy is a prerequisite to high quality of worklife which embraces the satisfaction of high order needs. This cannot be when workers cannot predict when their salaries will be paid. According to Onah 1995:

…. Associated with this is the high rate of indiscipline that attends adverse situations.

At times, salaries are not paid as at when due owing to late release of funds. Such, situations predispose staff to various acts of indiscipline such as absenteeism,

Lateness, indolence and other negative attitude to work, all in the name of lack of money. Such situation run to months, management usually finds it difficult to discipline staff as they tend to be uncontrollable.

At last when the meager salary is paid in the face of inflation, the worker does not enjoy it as they have a log of debt to settle which they incurred when the salary was being delayed. The balance, if any will not be able to sustain them till payment of another salary, partly due to high level of inflation in the country. Hence, most civil servants look for money from other sources to supplement the salary and the vicious circle begin again. The civil service in this precarious condition can hardly maintain discipline and the only option to them include to indulge in corrupt practices as a means to survive. The attitude of these civil servants is not peculiar to them but pervades the entire economy with virtually the same result on productivity and discipline.

b. Environmental Factor

The bulk of the factors responsible for indiscipline are traceable to the environment and the instinct to survive. The immediate environment of the employee is his organization and the community where he or she lives. The organization environment determines how an employee respond to its rules and regulations. Goss (1996) argues that for human resources management initiative to be successful, it must rest on the organization climate in which employee feel a sense of positive identification with and commitment to the organization. To the extent they feel that compliance with organizational rules and goal will enhance the satisfaction of their needs.

To that extent are they likely to comply with them and vice versa. The second aspect of the environmental factor consists of the larger society in which the civil servant lives. Since they work and live as participant member of a society, their interaction with the environment exert some influence on their concept and discipline

c. Social – Cultural Factor

The germane socio-cultural factor in this respect is ethnicity. Ethnicity in this sense include tribalism, sectionalism, nepotism and the like. Nnoli (2008), sees ethnicity as a social phenomenon associated with interaction among members of different ethnic groups. He stress further that ethnic group are social formation distinguished by communal character of their boundaries. The communal factors may include language, culture, or both. He stressed further that
a feeling of both belonging and rejection becomes the basis for interaction and distinguishing
individual in an ethnocentric organization or nation where X is discriminated against in the
sharing of social economic resource because of ethnic affiliation by Y or Y group, and Y group in
position will protect Y group members even where violated existing rules because of ethnic
relationship. In the same vein Chukwuezi (1996) observes that, within the various state civil
service and parastatal sectional and ethnic sentiment seems to hamper progress. He posits that
promotion, employment, allocation of duties and roles tend to be clouded by ethnic consideration.
There by sacrificing efficiency, and meritocracy for ethnicity, sectionalism and mediocracy.

d. Political Factor
In situations where the spoils system and winner takes all take precedence over merit
system in staff recruitment, selection placement and promotion (like Nigeria) the public service
are bound to be heavily staffed by party patrons and their wards who occupy job position by
virtue of their political role or affiliation rather than on merit. Despite the politicization of the
civil service with the entrenchment of the Federal Character principles in the constitution (see the
3rd schedule, part I 1999 constitution) to ensure that no state or ethnic group dominate other in the
appointment and promotion of staff, some appointments and promotion are skewed to favour
some ethnic group to the detriment of others. This act is capable of promoting indiscipline among
the aggrieved and frustrated staff and also among the favored group that may think they are
sacred cow because of their political godfather or political affiliation.

e. Individual Employee Factors
The environment is not the only stimulating factor of employee’s action even though it
plays a significance role. Reitz(1977) in discussing causes of behavior argue that human behavior
is a function of both the individual who behaves and the environment in which he or she behaves.
B = F (P, E) where B means behavior, P = the person behaving and E = the environment.
Therefore behavior is the function of interaction between P and E. this means that both the
individual and the environment can influence one another. In this sense some staff may be
naturally lazy or a pathological liar not only because the environment promote them but rather
because such behavior or act is innate.

f. Management Factor
The management factor includes laxity on the part of the manager to enforce discipline,
lack of confidence in subordinates, poor enforcement of role of civil service commission and poor
motivation of the work force. Attempts to employ friends, relatives and cronies contrary to the
laid down merit –based procedures by management is capable of promoting various act of
indiscipline in the civil service.

g. Ineffectiveness Of Disciplinary Process
The process of disciplining erring workers takes a long time and, in the process loses
steam and render the action impotent, taking cognizance of the fact that fairness and justice is
paramount, the process of staff discipline in the public service (civil service) pose no threat to
erring civil servants. Partly because of the process and partly due to the socio-political factors, the
threat of punishment as presently practiced hardly compel compliance to civil service rules. Even
where there are obvious cases of gross misconduct. A case at hand is the unending probe of
corrupt practices by the national assembly without any meaningful result, erring employees
sometimes get protected by godfather, colleagues and other consanguineously related to them
with the result that disciplinary action do not take its full course.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISCIPLINE AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE
Daft,(2000) defined organizational performance as the organization’s ability to attain its
goals by using resources in an efficient and effective manner. While discipline is necessary
inmany occasions, he argues that managers should dispense it carefully to avoid the
employees involved from „giving up” on an attitude of high performance. This is supported by
Drucker in Blanchard et al., (1985) who asserts that how well managers manages for business is dependent on how well they manage the „worker and work”. The employees’ behavior is highly affected or a true reflection of the managers attitudes. In disciplinemanagement attitudes are seen especially in cases where they can-not separate a worker from work. In as much as organizations need work to be done they should be careful not to hurt the human (resource) that does work. The imposition of discipline sometimes results in reduced performance of individuals, teams, or departments. For obvious reasons, management wants to avoid this result, yet it can occur because of the method of discipline used. It is thus imperative that managers should focus on correcting behavior without them getting emotional involved in disciplinary issues at hand.

Chien (2004) echoed that, successfully managing the balance between discipline and high performance is a combination of manager and employee personalities, workplace situations, pressures, as well as effective management techniques and strategies. He indicated that very few managers find it easy to address performance and discipline since poor performers require a unique skill set, a combination of conflict resolution techniques, an ability to empathize, high levels of emotional intelligence and an understanding of the impact of the legislation. It should be noted that most employers only appreciate the challenges of managing performance and discipline once they have been subjected to reinstatement or compensation order by the bargaining council. The starting point for management seeking to properly address discipline and performance issues is to gain appreciation of statutory requirements. He substantiates that the primary purpose of progressive discipline is to assist the employee to understand that a performance problem or opportunity for improvement exists. The process features increasingly formal efforts to provide feedback to the employee so he or she can correct the problem. The goal of progressive discipline is to improve employee performance. The process of progressive discipline is not intended as a punishment for an employee, but to assist the employee to overcome performance problems and satisfy job expectations. This line of thinking was further substantiated by Grote R.C. (1995) who argued that there is a synergy between discipline and corporate performance. He noted that performance feedback is of great influence to the disciplinary system as it holds employees accountable for their actions.

In analyzing the relationship between discipline and performance Grote came up with a Performance Assessment Guide (PAG) which stresses emphasis on a number of factors, first the guide emphasizes that the organizations need to make sure that job standards are communicated, employee receives feedback on performance and job standards are achieved. The guide stresses emphasis on the notion that if job standards are achieved then an employee is liable to continuously receive feedback on performance, if not it is the duty of the supervisor to investigate reasons. After investigation, action plan may be developed, implemented and or modified, in this case discipline may be imposed. Examples of performance problems include poor productivity, inability to perform task responsibilities, lack of knowledge, skills, abilities in area of responsibility, and inability to meet performance standards and or expectations. Problems such as these are not always completely within the employee’s control. It is incumbent upon the supervisor to play an active role in assisting the employee to meet the minimum requirements of the position through performance management, Halachmi A. (2005).

**STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING STAFF DISCIPLINE**

Productivity can be increased in the civil service if deliberate attempts are made to address the issues bothering an indiscipline among the workforce. Ghai (2002) notes that disputes, including acts of indiscipline, which are satisfactorily resolved, or at least managed, help to strengthen the overall system for higher productivity. Therefore the following recommendations are made which are capable of serving as a panacea for the problem of indiscipline and low productivity in Nigeria civil service.
First to address the socio-economic and political factor that impact on staff discipline. Interference by various political functionaries (from presidency to the least political appointee or elected official at all level of government) and political party in the process of recruitment, selection, placement, transfer, promotion and discipline of civil servant should restrained to allow the bureaucratic process and the merit system to take its normal course.

Second, there is the need for the three tiers of government (Federal, State and Local government) to normalize the payment of workers’ salaries. This entails prompt release of monthly allocation by the revenue mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) and speedy disbursement of the same by the Federal, State and Local governments. This will help to eliminate corruption emanating from irregular payment of salaries of workers.

Third, on ethnicity, intensive training, enlightenment and general re-orientation should be periodically undertaken for employees to foster unity in spite of workers diverse ethnic origins and obliterate the idea that civil service is still a white man’s job which should be attended to with halfhearted devotion.

Fourth, the situation in the civil service as it affects the enforcement of discipline need a radical change. The power to discipline junior civil servants, should be given to the line managers (Head of service, Head of department, Permanent secretaries etc.) in the ministries. If this is not done, the junior staff can flout the order and authority of their superior officers since they know that the ultimate power to discipline lies elsewhere other than the superior and perhaps they have links with the officer where the power is domicile. This will make discipline difficult if not impossible.

Sixth, moral demand that officers that will discipline a subordinate should be disciplined themselves (Self discipline). A great result will be achieve where superior officers are not guilty of a more gracious offences than the one they tend to reprimand their subordinates for. Also in tandem with this is that discipline actions should be taken with fairness, honesty, firmness and promptly.

Seventh, the government especially at the federal level should show more commitment to the anticorruption war which at present remain a child play. A bold step to bring to book all public officials who at one time or the other siphoned (or Siphoning) out or embezzled (or embezzling) public funds will serve as a deterrent to other erring officials. Furthermore, tough action in form of penalty of long jail term without option of fine should be put in place to deter other offenders.

Finally, Taylor (1967) in his principles of Scientific Management and McGregor’s (1960) Theory ‘X’ in the one hand stated that human being hate work and would avoid it at the available opportunity while on the other hand McGregor’s theory Y claims that employees enjoy work, exercise self-direction and accept responsibilities. Therefore reward and punishment are both instrument of discipline while prompt reward of a desirable conduct will promote, motivate and encourage employee to continue in the good work, sanctions of uncomplimentary attitude by employees will serve as a corrective measure and discourage unpleasant attitude.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this paper to examine the issues of indiscipline and low productivity in Nigerian civil service. It is pertinent to note, however, that the factors identified as causing indiscipline in Nigeria civil service and the strategies for correcting the menace as well as the conclusion reached are by no means exhaustive. It is also worth mention that Nigeria civil service is only a reflection of the Nigeria society at large within which it operates.

The factors of indiscipline discussed are characteristic of Nigeria society not peculiar to civil service alone. Consequently, the recommendation can only be effective if applied in the light of a global need to sanitize the society as a whole.
Behaviour is a function of the perceived consequences as explained in the theoretical framework. It therefore, follow that if the civil service will enhance discipline for efficiency and effectiveness in the productivity of its staff, it must have effective control of the consequences of its.

However, civil service discipline must be fair, objective and reasonable. By itself implementation of the recommendation will be insufficient unless the management (including political leadership) set good example.
REFERENCE


